Baker Lake sockeye

11-1-14 Mill Creek meeting notes

Below are the meeting notes, summarized from public input at the Baker Lake Sockeye Workshop on Nov. 1, 2014. We have expanded on the bulleted points with WDFW responses/discussion that took place at the meeting. This summary does not cover everything discussed at the meeting but instead covers the main topics of interest in no particular order.

- More opportunity is wanted
    - The meeting participants seemed to universally support more opportunity. Public input at North of Falcon (NOF) has been supportive of more of the non-treaty share of sockeye being used for lake fishing opportunity than river fishing opportunity, leading to limitation of opportunity downstream.
- Increase bag limits. Increase length of river that is open. Consider different dates for fishery and/or flexible ending dates. Want more bank access on Skagit River. Consider fishing regulations in lower Baker River, economic impact on Concrete.
    - Bag limits and length of season are two ways to increase recreational opportunity for Baker sockeye and is typically discussed at NOF each year. We typically prefer to have pre-determined ending dates for fisheries, which increases compliance with regulations, however extending a fishery (i.e. flexible end dates) if catches were below expectations is one option to help maximize river opportunity. The portion of the river that was open in 2014 was the result of negotiations with the treaty tribes and input from non-treaty fishermen during NOF. There have been issues with conflict during times and areas where recreational openings overlapped with treaty net openings, and seasons in recent years have been developed to minimize the risk of such conflicts.
- Use sonar to count fish at the mouth of the Skagit to get a more timely in-season update
    - A program to estimate of the number of sockeye entering the Skagit using hydroacoustic technology could provide an early and accurate estimate of the number of sockeye returning each year. There are several major obstacles to implementing such a program, including the cost, finding a suitable downstream site for a counting station, and obtaining species composition data needed for hydroacoustic estimates.
- Use adaptive management for fishery
    - Every step of management of Baker sockeye is adaptive. Stock assessment and catch data are updated annually prior to the development of pre-season forecasts. Catch projections for fisheries are updated prior to development of proposed fishing schedules. The most up to date information available is used in-season to inform management decisions.
- Buffer both non-treaty and treaty preseason shares to avoid a situation that would lead to inequity in catch sharing.
    - This idea of a share buffer was a key point made from several constituents in attendance. The concept would put in place limits on both non-treaty and treaty

harvestable shares, to set aside a portion of the return believed to be harvestable until fisheries managers have confirmation of preseason forecast by an agreed-to in-season update. This buffer may help minimize catch imbalance in years similar to 2014, where the run came in below preseason forecast, and harvest available to recreational fishers was significantly less than treaty catch. Because the run cannot be updated reliably until more than half of the run has entered the trap, the tribes would have to forgo harvest in their net fisheries until the majority of the fish had passed through and were no longer available to harvest. This would mean that in most years, the only option for the tribes to catch the tribal share would be to 'harvest' fish at the trap.

- Tribes take fish from Baker trap
    - Several participants stated that the catch could be limited in-season by having the tribes forgo fishing opportunity downstream and instead take fish from the trap. WDFW explained that there is no legal basis for the department to regulate the gear the tribes use to catch their share of the harvest.
- Consider other models for forecasting. Improve accuracy of preseason forecast.
    - Each year the models used to predict the return are updated with the previous year's data and the model with the best statistical performance is selected for predicting the upcoming year's return. In essence the particular model used to forecast Baker sockeye on a given year is the best-fit model. Over the last 5 years, forecasts have steadily gained better accuracy and are now within the typical range of forecast accuracy for sockeye in other watersheds.
- Let the number of fish transported to the lake be larger early in the season, rather than dribbled in, to provide better catch rates in the lake fishery.
    - WDFW will review the broodstocking schedule and see if opportunities exist to release more fish into the lake earlier in the season, while still meeting the desired range and variability in run timing of broodstock and beach spawners. Note that any decrease in the number of fish used for broodstock early in the return would result in increased risk of not meeting broodstock needs.
- Look at run timing vs. catch timing to maximize recreational catch in the river fishery
    - Run timing is variable from year to year, and there are no known reliable predictors of the variability. The shorter the length of in-river openings, the less likely they are to occur during the peak of the run.
- Consider Skagit Bay fishery
    - Bay fisheries for salmon during the sockeye return are problematic due to encounters with ESA-listed Chinook salmon during any salmon-directed opening.
- Tribal effort should be spread over time
    - Tribal fishing effort on a given year typically spans the majority of the migration, and is restricted by usual and accustomed fishing areas for each tribe. The timing of the tribal fisheries tends to coincide with normal timing of sockeye are migration through those areas.